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WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE STATE? I

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One of the remarkable effects of the Great War has been the revival of the long-suspended campaign against "the state." Sentiments that remind one strongly of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political thought have been rather freely expressed of late. Individualism and philosophical anarchism may well claim substantial victories and significant conversions. "The state—that is the enemy," the radical individualists said and wrote in the eighties and nineties of the last century. Among their authorities—in a scientific sense, of course—were British, French, and even Teutonic thinkers who had deplored the steady extension of the state's functions and the growth of "paternalism" and "compulsion" at the expense of the individual citizen or the dissenting group. *Laissez faire* was the popular liberal doctrine in those days, and while it was admitted that the existing social-economic order was by no means perfect, and that much injustice and special privilege existed which demanded the attention of sincere and progressive men, the remedy for all the social ills was declared to be "more liberty," more competition, and less governmental intermeddling with 'natural' human activities.

A few years ago these phrases would have sounded very strangely, had any prominent thinker cared to use them. They would have been received with amusement and astonishment, as something ancient, irrelevant, and meaningless. New ideas of the state, of government in relation to the citizen, were in full possession of the field of thought. The individualistic school was hardly more than a memory. Governmental interference, regulative and protective legislation in the interest of the weak, the disinherited, the ignorant, and the poor were all but universally favored. Children, women, laborers, mechanics, were held to be

entitled to the especial care of the modern democratic state. What was government, the argument ran, but co-operation for common benefits, and what could be more natural than that victims of past iniquity or present maladjustment should invoke the aid of the state in their own behalf? After all, what they demanded was simple justice, and justice was the business of the state, because it was essential to the general welfare, to social harmony and security. Only selfish, reactionary groups or classes, determined to preserve artificial, injurious privileges and opposed to justice, could object to such state intervention.

The Great War, however, has brought about a remarkable change in the attitude of many thinkers and philosophers, not excepting socialists, toward the state and government. A man of the intellectual standing of Editor L. P. Jacks, of the *Hibbert Journal*, confesses alleged guilt in having believed human nature capable of such atrocities and brutalities as the war produced, and moves to quash that indictment. Not human nature, he says, but *state nature* is the author of these monstrous crimes and bottomless woes; state nature overrides and stifles weak human nature and makes us cruel, savage, bloodthirsty. State nature absolves us from moral responsibility. We "obey orders," the orders of the state. Hence the true task of civilization and humanity henceforth is to weaken state nature and exalt human nature. We must, then, reduce the power and importance of the state, "the coldest of monsters," as Nietzsche called it. Another philosopher, Bertrand Russell, while admitting that in certain directions the power and functions of the state have properly been increased and should indeed be further increased, is yet vigorously belaboring the state for alleged usurpations in realms which it cannot invade, according to him, without spreading evil and disaster. Mr. Russell's distribution of emphasis is different from Herbert Spencer's, but the spirit is the same in the respective writings of these British thinkers. Emile Vandevelde, the Belgian socialist leader has been writing about "Socialism versus the State"!

It is not surprising that lesser lights should also be indulging in speculation concerning the future of the state, the amount of state-ism that may safely be permitted to survive when the

stricken and exhausted world is regenerated and rehabilitated, and the changes in political methods and machinery that should be pressed by the democratic and progressive forces of society.

To some extent the revival of the critical and hostile treatment of the state is merely the natural reaction from the superficial and rhetorical German eulogies of the semi-divine state that have purposely, and rightly, been circulated among us and among our allies. Germans too often blindly worship the state; they are ready to die for it or to revert to savagery for its sake. To them the state is a mystical, unknowable institution; the glory and strength of the state would justify any conduct on the part of its instruments. The state is above and beyond our ethical conceptions, or right and wrong. Piracy, treaty breaking, treachery, betrayal of friends, brutal treatment of neutrals, merciless destruction of enemies—all these things are permissible when decreed by or in the name of the German state. It is not strange that the practical, pragmatic, hard-headed Anglo-Saxons or Americans should shudder at this superstitious worship of a mere abstraction and should be led to emphasize, or overemphasize, the utilitarian view of the state, the idea that the state is an organization maintained in the interest of order and peace, and pledged to carry out the ascertained will of the greatest number of qualified votes.

But a little reflection will convince the thinking person that the Anglo-Saxon world has by no means solved the problems connected with the state or got rid of the conflicts between the state and the individual or the minority. The distinction between state nature and human nature, for example, is not a German distinction, nor was it meant to be limited to Germany. In the freest and most democratic state individuals will do things for the state that they would never consent to do for themselves or their families. The shifting and evasion of moral responsibility, with all the consequences thereof, may be observed in corporations as well as in states. Men do as officials, as trustees, as representatives, what they would refuse to do as individuals, in their own interest. This is as true of executions of criminals by deputy sheriffs as it is of the misuse of funds and dodging of taxes by directorates of private or quasi-public companies.

Surely we cannot contemplate the dissolution of all forms of corporate and organized social action. We cannot revert to the mythical state of nature in which simple human nature always confronted like human nature—for good or for ill. We cannot denounce and abrogate that unwritten “social contract” though, after all, it never was formally negotiated. We must and shall maintain all sorts and conditions of political, social, economic, and other organizations for the sake of the undoubted advantages of co-operation and collective-action. We shall not abolish the state as a form or organization, for there is nothing we could put in its place—unless it be mobocracy, lynch law, which, assuredly, the most vigorous critics of the organized modern state cannot regard as an improvement thereon. But, if we are to preserve the state, the question that faces us is, How much power shall we give it, and what scope?

Let us assume that we have made the state as free and democratic as possible. Let us assume that the franchise has been extended to all men and all women of sound mind and average honesty; that proportional representation has been adopted in order to give every class, party, and group its proper weight in government; that the upper house of the legislative body has been radically mended or ended; that the people nominate and elect every important official; that they have all the safeguards and checks that are now deemed essential, or at least desirable, if popular and democratic government is to be a reality; and that so far as organic law, form, structure, and machinery are concerned, we have made the state safe for democracy. The question still remains, How much power shall we intrust to and confer upon our completely democratized state?

If it is state nature, and not human nature, that is responsible for war, or for provocative diplomacy, shall we take away from the government the power to declare war or to recognize the existence of a state of war? Some prominent pacifists have actually favored such a limitation as this; they have advocated a popular referendum on so vital an issue as war versus peace. They have favored this as the logical corollary from open, above-board, democratic diplomacy. But, as a matter of fact, the two

proposals do not belong to the same category. Open diplomacy undoubtedly is a check on selfish, tricky, or arrogant politicians clothed with a little brief authority. Open diplomacy is a safeguard because it implies public discussion of international problems and projects and because secret diplomacy means distrust and fear of the electorate of the democratic principle in government. To demand truly democratic government is to demand, tacitly, open and frank diplomacy. The question of the limits of state activity is not involved here at all. The government is not the state, nor is the state the government. Suppose we say that under the truest and most complete democracy "the State—it is the People." What do we mean by "the People"? Not the whole people, for unanimity among the people is almost unthinkable. The majority rules and must rule in a democracy, and when the minority submits it submits to "the State," for the majority has spoken for the state. A referendum on war would give us nothing more, at the best, than the decision of the majority. Should a majority of the voters decide for war, the minority would be forced to fight, to suffer, to pay heavy taxation, to mortgage the future, just as it is forced today, when war is decided on, not by a referendum, but by a vote in Congress of a majority of the agents and representatives of the electors. It may be true that an absolutely democratic state would not be as apt to vote for war as a limited democracy, although that is distinctly a debatable proposition. Pacifists who are working for greater democracy, for the extension of the initiative and the referendum, cannot be charged with inconsistency, provided they are satisfied that greater democracy means fewer wars and less aggressiveness and imperialism in foreign affairs. But pacifists and "unterrified" democrats should not deceive themselves as to the relative strength and importance of state nature and human nature in a pure democracy. A war decreed by a majority of the people may be as sanguinary, as cruel, as remorseless, as a war decreed by a congress, or by an aristocratic clique, or by a single ruler. War itself is incompatible with democracy. War demands centralized control, unity, strict discipline. There can be no referendum on such questions as military organization, the use of poison gas,

the attacking of cities from the air, etc. It should not be forgotten, by the way, that fierce and angry demands for reprisals have come, in the recent war, from the press and the public, not from the responsible men in high positions. A referendum at a time of panic and resentment of some new atrocity might—nay, would—result in a manifestation of “human” nature that would cause state nature itself to shudder.

After all, if state nature is bad, why does human nature tolerate and submit to it? The greater includes the less, and evidently state nature is humanly natural. Our quarrel, then, is at bottom with human nature, and nothing could be more futile and idle than an indictment of human nature at large. *From human nature no appeal can be taken except to the same nature.* We usually appeal from nature drunk to nature sober, from nature wild to nature chastened, restrained, elevated. In this we are perfectly well advised. Human nature is still a house badly divided against itself. There are lower impulses and higher, selfish sentiments and unselfish, ignoble and noble. Moral evolution is as much a fact as physical, or scientific, or mechanical. It is possible to stimulate, quicken, strengthen the better nature of man, just as it is possible to stimulate and strengthen man's lower nature. How to identify ourselves with our better nature, how to oppose and silence the demands we know to be wrong and unworthy, and more successfully conform our conduct to our professions and ideals, is, indeed, a most difficult and serious question. But the point is that *that is the question*, the only question, that concerns those of us who are disappointed and dissatisfied with the present state of our civilization.

Of course, the appeal to the better nature of man is in part an appeal to his reason, which is regarded by some thinkers as our “supreme inheritance.” What, we ask ourselves, can reason suggest in the way of preventives, safeguards, checks, in a word, mechanism, with a view to preventing needless and immoral war in the future? Can we deter governments, parliaments, and nations from wrongful, predatory, immoral acts, as our criminal law and penal institutions are believed to deter individuals from committing antisocial acts? Are there any lessons in history,

and in our own experience, that we have not sufficiently taken to heart in the sphere of politics and foreign relations? What can we do in this sphere that we have not done?

Only when we conceive the problem in some such terms as these does light break upon us. Only then do we realize that by taking thought, by planning and contriving, and by deliberately undertaking to obstruct and discourage systems and policies that lead to war can we effectively promote the cause of peace and international amity.

Thus no one can doubt today that secret diplomacy has been in the past a fatal source of friction and danger. It has become clear to all that so far as possible secret diplomacy should be abolished. Many naïve persons imagine that when this has been said, all has been said. In truth, however, very little has been said. It will not be easy to wipe out all the diplomatic traditions and habits and to make a fresh start. One nation, or even a group of nations, could not abolish secret diplomacy. Advanced nations might refuse to make secret treaties, but how long would they be able to adhere to that virtuous and fine resolution if other important powers continued to negotiate secret treaties? No nation can isolate itself and ignore the realities of the present world. A nation has vital interests to protect and safeguard, and if it finds that it cannot do this without forming secret understandings, because the other powers are not advanced or democratic enough to renounce secret diplomacy, it is not too difficult to see what will happen.

Open diplomacy must tend to square and honorable dealing. It implies public discussion of foreign affairs and trust in the people. It presupposes the democratization of the diplomatic service itself. Aristocrats, as a rule, do not understand or sympathize with democratic principles. Even in England foreign affairs have been treated as a sort of special preserve for titled and distinguished personages. In the United States a John Hay could say sincerely that "our foreign policy is merely the Golden Rule applied to foreign affairs," but how many Americans accepted that affirmation without a skeptical smile or mental reserve? Is American diplomacy completely democratized? The

national House of Representatives has no voice in the making or unmaking of treaties. The Senate holds secret sessions to discuss treaties or foreign affairs. All this may have been unavoidable in the past, but that is beside the point. Suppose we take the position that henceforth foreign affairs should be discussed in open session, and that the House of Representatives should have as much power as the Senate in the domain of treaty making: will that go unchallenged? We must expect considerable and stubborn opposition to open and democratic diplomacy, even in the United States. Nevertheless, the idea is sound, and the progressive, democratic forces everywhere should fight for open diplomacy. It is a modest means, perhaps, yet a means to that devoutly wished-for consummation, peace, and good-will among the nations.

Another means to that same end is the creation or development and improvement of international conciliation and arbitration machinery. Such machinery existed in the fateful year 1914, and Prussian junkerdom haughtily and arrogantly frowned down every effort to procure a settlement of the so-called Serbian question at, and by, the international court at The Hague. Nevertheless, machinery and agencies that make for delay, for discussion, make for peace. The world needs more and better machinery of this type. It may or may not be possible to form in the near future a strong League of Nations to Preserve Peace. To propose such a league, we have seen, was to raise a hundred and one knotty questions. But it is obvious that the sincere friends of peace must seek the partial solution of the problem in that general direction and must be content to make short, experimental steps.

In so far as imperialism, colonialism, and exclusive trade advantages in backward countries have produced conflicts of supposed national interests, "the open door" is clearly a preventive of war. The power that opposes the open door serves notice that it will fight rather than accept equality of rights and opportunities. If such powers still exist, mere machinery will not remove the difficulty. These powers will have to be converted or coerced. If converted, well and good. If coerced into accepting the open door doctrine, then, manifestly, the coercion will be a species

of warfare—perhaps economic warfare. At any rate, to establish and secure general acceptance of that principle would be to remove a most prolific source of irritation, controversy, and war.

Even more potent a preventive of war than the open door is free commercial intercourse among the civilized and industrial nations. The freer the commercial intercourse, the better. The leveling of all tariff walls, the destruction of all customs houses, the complete freedom of international buying and selling, is the goal to be kept steadily in view; but it would be folly to assume that the present war has destroyed, or will destroy, the protective system. Many economists and intelligent men of affairs adhere to protection in principle and deem it essential to national welfare and prosperity. To these protection is not a feature of "preparedness" for war that will be rendered needless by a permanent peace. It is not likely that they will change their view regarding such purely economic, domestic, and national questions as the effect of high tariff rates on wages, productive efficiency, industrial stability, and diversification of industry. Those who say enthusiastically that free trade would prevent war forget that only convinced free traders would entertain the idea of repealing protective tariff legislation in order to remove that particular cause of war. The convinced and honest protectionist accepts neither the conclusion nor the premises of the free trader. The issue, therefore, will long remain a domestic and national one, not to be for a moment bracketed with such questions as colonial open doors, arbitration machinery, international courts, or open diplomacy.

Self-determination for or by subject nationalities or territories is a principle that, if generally accepted by the strong powers, would undoubtedly go far to advance the cause of universal peace. But none of the strong powers has accepted, or will accept, once for all the policy of self-determination as being applicable to any conceivable territorial dispute. Only the fanatical and visionary Bolshevik leaders could imagine that in self-determination they had discovered a miraculous, sovereign remedy or preventive. It was altogether sound and reasonable to suggest self-determination as a compromise applicable to Alsace-Lorraine, Poland, Italia

Irredenta, and Armenia. We know how the military caste of Prussia received that suggestion. But we should not delude ourselves about the attitude of the more liberal powers toward self-determination. It will not be applied generally to correct ancient or theoretical wrongs. It will not be applied to rectify past aggressions for the sake of consistency, logic, or abstract morality. Not even the radicals and advanced laborites of Great Britain have entertained for a moment the idea of applying self-determination to Egypt, India, or Ireland. As for the United States, how many of our anti-imperialists would seriously demand of the government the immediate application of self-determination to Porto Rico and the Philippines? Radicals should clear their minds of their own cant, if they expect the conservatives to clear their minds of hollow professions and made-to-order excuses. Bolshevism in international, as in national, affairs leads to chaos and retrogression.

Federalism in place of a tyrannical and arrogant nationalism is another wholesome and genuinely progressive and constructive principle which should be vigorously and tactfully promoted wherever conditions warrant or enjoin its application. The idea of federalism, of ample local autonomy and freedom for cultural development combined with a well-defined surrender of certain powers and functions to a central authority, does in truth carry balm and hope to many oppressed and embittered elements in Europe, and especially in the Near East. A rational federalism does away with the supposed necessity of "nationalizing" annexed or acquired populations, of suppressing manifestations of racial or cultural independence. Federalism makes unity and loyalty possible despite variety and heterogeneity of component elements. Federalism would have saved Austria and Hungary from the sanguinary conflict they precipitated because of Serbian designs on some of their Slav territory or populations. Federalism would have saved the Balkans from devastation and appalling waste of human resources. Federalism may yet save Russia, as it certainly has saved the United States. Federalism, therefore, is one of the surest ways to peace and one of the guaranties of peace.

In the light of all that has been said, is it not clear that, instead of asking the barren question, What shall we do with the state?—instead of setting up an unreal distinction between wicked state nature and benevolent human nature—the true and pertinent question to put to ourselves is, What can friends of peace do other than, and additional to, that which has been done, to limit, localize, avert, and prevent armed conflicts between states? In other words, how can we put an end to anarchy, the reign of brute force, in international relations and substitute as much law and reason in that sphere as we have succeeded in substituting for anarchy, strife, and force in the relations of the citizens or subjects of any fairly efficient modern state?

If these citizens or subjects do not want peace with their neighbors in other states, no effective machinery, no safeguards and checks, will be installed by them. If they have racial and nationalistic antipathies that cloud their reasoning powers and impel them to fight on the least provocation, or without any provocation at all; if they are jealous, envious, and malicious toward such neighbors; if they covet the goods or territories of such neighbors and are not ashamed to embark on predatory enterprises, on what Spencer called international burglary, in order to grab such goods or territories, then it is safe to say that appeals to their “human nature” will be as vain as appeal to the nature of the animal or bird of prey.

Again, if there are multitudes of citizens or subjects who rather welcome war, openly or secretly, and who cannot be counted on to support any genuine peace movement, it is necessary to determine scientifically the approximate strength of these elements in a modern industrial and civilized community and to ascertain the causes of so strange, reactionary, and socially pernicious an attitude. How can sane and normal human beings rejoice in wholesale murder, waste, destruction, torture, anguish, misery? After all, this is what the little word “war” means, and can anyone who is not a ferocious barbarian contemplate such things with satisfaction or even equanimity and indifference?

It will not do to say that there are no such human beings. The facts are too glaring and too well established to be overlooked.

There are men to whom war is a great, high adventure. There are men to whom war is a temporary relief from drudgery, monotony, and a hopeless struggle against want and privation. Exhortations and propaganda by pacifists never reach such men. To change them, we must change the whole social atmosphere first. Society must provide "moral equivalents of war," to use a phrase of the late William James. The conditions of life, labor, and recreation for hosts of men—and women—must be radically changed, and the changes required cannot be decreed by rulers or revolutionary assemblies. They will be the product of slow evolution.

In short, and to sum up, a little candid analysis and reflection will satisfy the thinking person that an attack on state nature by the pacifists and philosophers who are appalled by the awful slaughter and waste of the world-war is an attack on phantoms or empty abstractions. Neither the abolition nor the complete democratization of the state will abolish war. The distinction between human nature and state nature is superficial and arbitrary. The problem of war and peace is so fundamental and so broad that its solution presupposes and involves the solution of a score of knotty, complex, and historic problems—problems of social and economic organization, of domestic and international law, of education and of ethics and philosophy. To fight war is to fight imperialism, nationalism, and militarism. Several scholarly writers have pointed out that militarism is more than an institution—it is a state of mind, a body of ideas and prejudices. The same thing is true of imperialism, of nationalism, of protectionism. The democratization and purification of the political organization called the state is only one of the problems, and by no means the most difficult one, faced by lovers of humanity and peace.